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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 6194
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RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 7742
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 2729
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0930
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 9446
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 7643
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BRASILIA 000551

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SUBJECT: BRAZIL: AHMADINEJAD'S VISIT OFF, THEN ON, AND
FINALLY OFF

REF: BRASILIA 000477

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Classified By: Ambassador Clifford Sobel, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

Brazil: Ahmadinejad's visit off, then on, and finally off

11. (SBU) Summary: One day before Iranian President Ahmadinejad was scheduled to arrive in Brasilia leading a delegation of more than 100 government and industry officials, Brasilia was awash in contradictory news reports and rumors of whether the visit would or would not be postponed. It was not until 5:00 pm May 4 that the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations (MRE) finally confirmed the postponement of the visit until after the Iranian elections. According to both press and Embassy contacts, the Iranians were concerned about an insufficiently high profile for the visit, negative press in advance of the visit, what they considered an inadequate response to press attacks by the GOB, and an MRE statement critical of Ahmadinejad's remarks at the Durban Review conference. The fairly late cancellation and the bungled manner in which it was communicated to the Brazilian government likely bothered the Brazilians, but it will probably not affect Brazil's interest in pursuing closer ties with Iran or the prospect for a future visit after the Iranian elections. End summary.

On, then off, then on, and finally off

12. (C) In light of reports from Iranian news sources over the weekend indicating that Ahmadinejad was postponing his visit to Brasilia, poloff contacted Minister Rodrigo do Amaral, chief of Staff to Undersecretary for MRE Political Affairs Roberto Jaguaribe, in the morning of May 4 to request confirmation of the postponement of the visit. Hearing of the news reports for the first time, Amaral asked poloff to forward links to the news stories, but added that at that very moment Iran's Ambassador to Brazil was meeting with Jaguaribe to finalize details of Ahmadinejad's agenda. He further noted that at 4:00 pm that day, Jaguaribe would hold a press conference to discuss the visit.

13. (C) Several hours later, during lunch with former President Carter, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim was asked about Ahmadinejad's visit and confirmed that it was in question. He noted that the Iranians were not happy about press criticism of Ahmadinejad and his visit and what Iran saw as the GOB's lackluster defense of Iran (Note: On Sunday, May 3, hundreds of people in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo protested against Ahmadinejad's visit. End note). According to Amorim, the GOB had been very clear in discussing the visit with press that Brazil seeks a policy of engagement with Iran, and that Iran is a major and influential power in the region that should have a role in the Middle East peace process. But, he told the Iranians, Brazil has a free press and the GOB can do nothing about what they decide to write. Cancellation of the visit would be "a mistake", Amorim told the Iranians, but added that "Brazil would not beg." Amorim ascribed the Iranian sensitivity to the upcoming election.

14. (C) Subsequent to the Amorim's comments, and after Brazilian news reports had picked up Iranian reports about the cancellation of the visit, at 1:30, Brazilian media reported that the Iranian Embassy in Brazil was indicating that the visit would take place. An hour later, Amaral again confirmed to Poloff that, while there had been some protocol-related hiccups with the visit, "at no time" had the visit been postponed.

15. (U) Finally, at around 5:00 pm, press began reporting that Itamaraty had confirmed that the visit had been postponed until after the Iranian elections. The reports also noted that the rest of the delegation, composed of Iranian business leaders, would continue with the rest of the agenda, which included meetings in Sao Paulo with Brazilian business

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leaders in the areas of oil and gas, mining, and electric energy. Folha de Sao Paulo quoted the message Ahmadinejad sent President Lula postponing the visit: "In expressing my greetings to Your Excellency, your government, and to the Brazilian nation, I'm grateful for the cordial invitation to visit Brazil. Bilateral relations between our two countries accelerated in pace in terms of increasing cooperation. I am very interested in making the visit, based in the political will to develop bilateral relations in all fields. I ask Your Excellency to accept postponement of my official visit until an opportunity after the presidential elections in Ira, until a convenient date which can be arranged through our Foreign Ministries. I beg God for the prosperity and well-being of the Brazilian nation and for the success of Your Excellency."

Excuses, excuses

16. (C) During a dinner in honor of former President Carter, Brazilian guests told Ambassador Sobel that several factors were at play in the postponement. One was Iranian unhappiness with protocol-related arrangements Itamaraty had proposed. The Iranians apparently wanted the standard official and public ceremony for heads of state, which was too difficult to pull off in the temporary makeshift offices where President Lula is currently working from (Note: Planalto Palace is currently undergoing renovations and the President is working out of the Bank of Brazil Cultural Center, an isolated building away from downtown Brasilia. End note.) In addition, the Iranians were unhappy that there would be no parade in honor of Ahmadinejad. Up to Monday afternoon, there remained disagreement with the wording of the communique that would be issued by the two countries. Finally, news reports are also citing Iranian unhappiness with Itamaraty's statement in reaction to Ahmadinejad's Durban II speech, which was slightly critical of Ahmadinejad's remarks, and noted that Brazil would use Ahmadinejad's visit to share Brazil's views that such comments "damage the climate of dialogue and understanding

necessary for the international treatment of the issue of discrimination." According to Estado de Sao Paulo, Iranian diplomat Hussein Rezvani, in reaction to Brazil's criticism of Ahmadinejad's Durban remarks, said they were not a "good sign in light of (Ahmadinejad's) visit."

Some relief...and embarrassment

¶7. (C) According to contacts at the Ministry of Finance and Itamaraty, reactions to the postponement ranged from relief to embarrassment. According to the Ministry of Finance's Luis Mellin, there was reluctance within the Brazilian government to extend export credits to Iran, and as a result the postponement was actually welcomed in some GOB circles. Reaction at Itamaraty was one of embarrassment. After Itamaraty had announced the postponement Amaral called poloff to make sure poloff knew that this had been a last minute cancellation and that his previous statements reflected what his office knew them at the time. He noted that the official message to postpone the visit was communicated to Itamaraty around 4:00 by the Iranian Ambassador, which caused the delay in Jaguaribe's press conference.

Comment:

¶8. (C) It seems clear that the postponement caught the Brazilians by surprise and that Iran handling of it probably ruffling a few feathers in the process. If, however, the Iranian cancellation was based on a calculation that the visit by Ahmadinejad might do his campaign more harm than good, the May 5 press seems to have confirmed the fears: the

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op-eds prepared to run on the day of the visit were overwhelmingly negative, and stories would almost certainly have focused on planned protests. Nonetheless, amidst the opposition to Ahmadinejad lies fairly consistent support for expanding relations with Iran, and we expect that this aborted visit will not affect Brazil's interest in continue to pursue closer ties with Iran or the prospects for a future visit at some point after the Iranian elections.

SOBEL